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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Iran: Nuclear Program
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- [1](#)3. Vladimir Putin's Visit to Israel, April 27-28

Key stories in the media:

All media (banner in Ha'aretz) reported that 40,000 to 90,000 people, depending on the sources, attended a rally in the Gaza Strip's Katif Bloc Wednesday to protect the disengagement plan. National Union MK Arie' Eldad called for civil disobedience, which prompted left-wing politicians to demand that he be put on trial. Talking on Israel Radio, Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin (Likud), an opponent of disengagement, condemned Eldad's remark.

Yediot, Maariv and Jerusalem Post led with issues related to Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Israel. Maariv quoted Israeli defense sources as saying that Putin, who talks about peace while supporting Syria and the Iranian nuclear plan, is playing a double game and assisting Israel's enemies. Yediot quoted senior GOI sources as saying that Israel will not take part in Putin's initiative to host a conference on the Middle East. The newspaper also quoted sources in the U.S. administration as saying that the U.S. believes that an international conference should be convened, but not at this time. Jerusalem Post and Ha'aretz write that PM Sharon is likely to raise with Putin the issue of Russian plans to sell military equipment to the PA. In a press conference carried over by Israel Radio this afternoon, Putin reassured Israel that the missiles Russia sold Syria cannot be used by terrorists, while President Moshe Katsav emphasized the threat posed to Israel by Syria, and the risk that those missiles could make it harder for Israel to combat terrorism. Putin said that Russia is cooperating with Iran in the development of peaceful uses in the nuclear domain, but that it is opposed to Iran's plans to procure nuclear weapons.

All media continued coverage of the forthcoming arms sale by the U.S. of GBU-28 bombs to Israel. Recalling Sharon's promises that Israel has no plans to attack Iran and citing Vice President Dick Cheney's warning in January that Israel could in the future try to attack Iran's nuclear installations, the media extensively speculated on the matter. Speaking on Israel Radio this morning, a former senior official in Israel's defense industry said that Israel already has similar, locally made weapons.

Israel Radio quoted PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas as saying that the PA will stop mortar and Qassam rocket attacks against Israel even if the use of force is needed. The radio quoted PA Information Minister Nabil Shaath as saying in an interview with the East Jerusalem newspaper Al-Quds that there have been contacts between the PA and Egypt regarding the issue of control of the Philadelphi route. Shaath was quoted as saying that the PA is also discussing the issue, as well as "safe passage" between Gaza and the West Bank, with Israel and the U.S.

Ha'aretz reported that the Quartet's special envoy to the disengagement plan, former World Bank president James Wolfensohn, is due to arrive in Israel this weekend for his first visit in his new role. Wolfensohn will meet with Vice Premier Shimon Peres to discuss coordination of various civilian aspects of the

planned withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank. The newspaper reported that Vice Premier Shimon Peres met Wednesday with A/S David Welch. According to Ha'aretz, Peres called for encouraging American private sector investments in the territories, and described the economic and security problems raised by the opening of the Palestinian port in Gaza. Peres emphasized the importance of preserving the unified customs umbrella over Israel and the PA. Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post say that Peres told Welch about his efforts to get the Netherlands to market flowers grown by farmers in Gaza.

Ha'aretz reported that the PA will set up special courts that will determine the ownership of land to be evacuated by Israel.

Maariv reported that the IDF has recently decided to set up a wall in Hebron to divide between the Palestinian and Jewish residents of the city.

Leading media cited a Rand Corporation study that proposes to lay the groundwork for long-term development of a Palestinian state. The study recommends linking major Palestinian cities in the West Bank and Gaza, mostly through a high-speed railway line. The estimated cost for the first 10 years of operation is about USD 33 billion, with USD 6 billion of that amount to build the rail and roads.

Yediot cited a Washington Post report as saying that Syrian intelligence agents in Lebanon have moved to other addresses and continue to intervene in that country's economic and political matters.

Ha'aretz reported that the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has come out against Haifa University Prof. David Bukay, who has allegedly denigrated Arabs and Muslims.

1. Iran: Nuclear Program:

Summary:

Military correspondent Amir Rappaport wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The ... message [of the United States' forthcoming sale of bombs to Israel] is directed thousands of kilometers eastwards -- at Iran."

Block Quotes:

"A Clear Message to Tehran"

Military correspondent Amir Rappaport wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (April 28): "The Pentagon's announcement Wednesday that it has decided to sell Israel 'bunker-busting' bombs is meant for Congress, which is supposed to approve the sale. The real message is directed thousands of kilometers eastwards -- at Iran.... The Iranians are supposed to understand those are bombs that can indeed hit underground commands and nuclear installations. But they also know, perhaps better than anybody, that it is doubtful whether they will grant Israel a military option to eliminate their nuclear program in a preemptive strike.... Fascinating moves will undoubtedly occur in the chess game that will end either with an Iranian renouncement of the bomb, or, heaven forbid, in a nuclear bomb that will threaten Israel. Meanwhile, another important lesson can be drawn from the present U.S. move: security and strategic interests between the two countries remain strong, despite the cooling of relations between the Pentagon and the Israeli Defense Ministry.... In this case, basic interests have prevailed over poor relations at the personal level."

2. Syrian-Lebanese Track:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Even

if there is some logic in the American position, which asks that Israel not save the shaky Damascus regime through negotiations, Israel cannot wait for foreign initiatives."

Block Quotes:

"Withdrawal From Occupied Territory"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (April 28): "The Syrian evacuation [of troops from Lebanon] is the victory of a surprising and rare awakening of public opinion in the region, and the continuation of the reverberations being felt for the last two years in the region, ever since President George W. Bush launched a war that toppled Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq.... Lebanon will now face a triple challenge: electing a president, who for the first time in years will not be a Syrian puppet; putting an end to the military character of the Hizbullah and turning it into a political movement; and sending troops to the Lebanese-Israeli border to foil terror. If Lebanon succeeds in these challenges, it will change the entire character of the northern arena. If indeed the Hizbullah threat is removed and the policies -- in effect, the regime -- of Damascus change, Israel will have to prepare for negotiations with Syria on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 242 for the return of the Golan Heights. Even if there is some logic in the American position, which asks that Israel not save the shaky Damascus regime through negotiations, Israel cannot wait for foreign initiatives. When there is a new regime in Damascus, Israel will be one country closer to completing the ring of peace around it -- an external ring that will also require an end to the conflict with the Palestinians. The spirit of the times sweeps aside all those who try to hold onto occupied territories."

13. Vladimir Putin's Visit to Israel, April 27-28:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The Russian president's visit to Israel is indeed historic, dramatic and important, but it is also dangerous."

Correspondent Ilya Krichevsky wrote in conservative Russian-language Vesty: "Relations between the Russian President and the Israeli Prime Minister will obviously remain cordial, but in actual fact, relations between their countries will probably not improve after this historic visit."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Doctor Vladimir and Mr. Putin"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (April 28): "Outwardly Ariel Sharon will show a great deal of respect for Doctor Vladimir, but inwardly he is very critical of Mr. Putin. The Russian president's visit to Israel is indeed historic, dramatic and important, but it is also dangerous.... Perhaps history will indeed repeat itself and Russia will soon revert to what it once was: the official arms supplier for the Arab and Muslim world, hardly to Israel's benefit. On the other hand, the current relations between Israel and Russia are the best that the two states have ever had. The missile deal with Syria was changed under pressure from Israel and the shoulder-fired missile deal was cancelled. There is considerable chemistry in the relationship between Putin and Sharon. In general, the Russians support Israel's struggle against terrorism. Economic cooperation between the two countries is growing apace, so the cup is also half-full, perhaps more than half. Apart from that everything is as usual. Behind the scenes a drama has been unfolding. It is not simple and it is much more interesting than the official ceremonies. A quarter of the population of Israel speaks Russian. Recently Putin has been leading an effort to stop Russian immigration to Israel by improving the conditions of the Jews in Russia, creating the semblance of freedom, openness, a flourishing of Jewish culture and a war on anti-Semitism."

II. "A Friendship Without Conferences"

Correspondent Ilya Krichevsky wrote in conservative Russian-language Vesty (April 28): "Relations with Russia are very important to Israel. ... Putin's visit has been called historic ... without ... exaggerating the significance of the event. This is the first official visit of a Russian leader to Israel.... However, the question about its outcome is still open. Israel does not hide its disappointment with Russia's foreign policy -- arms sales to Syria and the ongoing participation of Russian experts and facilities in executing Iran's 'peaceful' nuclear program. Should Ariel Sharon succeed in using his exceptionally cordial relations with Vladimir Putin in order to balance this policy, this brief visit by President Putin could be dubbed historic from two aspects -- from the point of view of protocol as well as the improvement of the situation in the region. But ... there are not many chances for such a development.... Putin's image and relations with Americans and Europeans are ... rather a secondary issue for the Israelis; it's much more important to explain Israel's position to [Russia] as one of the Middle East peace process's co-sponsors and to neutralize activities which might harm Israel's security. A personal friendship may not suffice to achieve this goal. ... Relations between the Russian President and the Israeli Prime Minister will obviously remain cordial, but in actual fact, relations between their countries will probably not improve after this historic visit."

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